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SIMPLY . . .
A BRIEF HISTORY OF EAST TIMOR**

Compiled by *John Taylor*

1 Settlement

Many centuries ago successive waves of migrants, mostly Malay and Melanesian, settled on the island with the original inhabitants, the *Atoni* people of the central highlands. This ethnic mix was compounded by the arrival of Chinese, Arab and Gujerati traders, who visited Timor in search of its valuable sandalwood. The island was divided into kingdoms ruled by princes (called *rajas* or *liurai*) and clan leaders who exercised power in kin-related villages. These contained hamlets whose inhabitants grew subsistence crops and traded with each other. The first Europeans to settle in the area were the Portuguese, on the neighboring island of Solor in 1566. They made annual trips to Timor to collect sandalwood and trade in finished goods. Their rivals in the region were the Dutch, who followed soon after, gaining control of most of what we now know as Indonesia.

2 Colony

Although the Portuguese established a colonial administration in Timor in 1702, they disputed and fought with the Dutch for control over the island for the next three centuries. The two halves of the island finally were separated in an agreement signed by the two colonial powers in 1913 - the Dutch taking the west and the Portuguese the east. The Europeans profited from their control over the sandalwood trade and introduced coffee in the mid-nineteenth century, which became Timor's principal; export, supplemented with rubber, tobacco, copra and peanuts. Revolts by the Timorese against colonial rule were frequent, and most of them were suppressed brutally. The last of these continued from the late 1880s until 1912, and was defeated with the deaths of around 3,000 Timorese.

3 Occupation

During the Second World War Timor was occupied by the Japanese, who encountered widespread resistance to their attempts to force the population to grow food, both for their troops and for export. By the time the Japanese surrendered in 1945 some 60,000 Timorese, or 13 per cent of the population, had died. In 1949 West Timor became part of the post-colonial Indonesian Republic. Portugal retained East Timor, adding a small 'legislative assembly' whose selected members were trained as an indigenous administrative elite. Economically, the Portuguese pinned their

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hopes on oil - discovered in 1972, and on an expansion of tourism. An embryonic nationalist opposition emerged in the 1960s based on young people educated in Catholic schools and the Dili seminary or trained in a radicalized Portuguese army.

4 Independence

On 25 April 1974 the Portuguese Armed Forces Movement overthrew the Caetano regime and began a process of decolonization in Portugal's African and Asian colonies. In East Timor political groups were organized and given a free rein. In January 1974 the Timorese Democratic Union (UDT) entered a coalition with the Revolutionary Front for an Independent Timor (FRETILIN). Both parties agreed with the Portuguese to move towards independence over a three-year period. The Indonesian military bribed and persuaded several UDT leaders to organize a coup in August 1975.

But by September Fretilin was in control of virtually all of East Timor. Its leaders continued to recognize Portuguese sovereignty and called repeatedly on the Governor to return and oversee the transition to independence. Lisbon refused, and Fretilin's administration became the *de facto* government. On 28 November, with the Indonesian invasion imminent, Fretilin leaders declared independence, establishing the Democratic Republic of East Timor.

5 Invasion

On 7 December 1975 Indonesian armed forces invaded. The invasion was followed by brutal treatment of the civilian population - indiscriminate killings and rape in the streets of Dili, with buildings sacked and burned. By February 1976, with troops spreading out from the capital to occupy villages to the east and south, East Timor's Indonesian-appointed deputy governor, Lopez la Cruz, admitted that 60,000 East Timorese had been killed.

Despite this onslaught the Indonesians controlled only the coastal and border regions, and areas accessible from the country's tiny network of roads. Troop numbers were increased and draconian controls were imposed on the population, isolating the territory from the outside world. In an operation beginning in late 1977 - called 'Encirclement and Annihilation' - mountain areas where people had taken refuge were bombed. In 1978 and 1979 tens of thousands of East Timorese came down from the mountains, to be rounded up and resettled in strategic villages set up by the military. Many died of hunger. Those who were not transported to camps were either imprisoned or disappeared.

6 Control

Continuous military campaigns against population had a devastating effect. In one called *Operasi Keamanan* ('Operation Final Cleansing') in 1981, males between the ages if eight and

fifty were recruited to form human chains across the island to flush out Fretilin groups. After such campaigns many of the population were relocated in 'resettlement villages', distant from both their homes and the zones of fighting, where they were subjected to a rigorous system of internal control. Regular famines resulted.

Meanwhile, land outside the villages was devoted to the cultivation of cash crops for export in agricultural projects set up by the military, who appropriated most of the land previously under plantation crops. Land was transferred to migrants from areas outside East Timor as part of the Government's 'Indonesianization' strategy. Mosques were built at an increasing rate. East Timor's *lingua franca*, Tetum, was banned, and Bahasa Indonesian taught in schools. Informers, directed by appointed elders (*katuas*) became responsible for the surveillance of groups of 10 to 15 families.

7 Resistance

By 1979 Fretilin was almost destroyed as an organization. All its original leaders had been captured or killed, leaving behind a small group which managed during 1980 to reorganize the movement from the eastern tip of the island, attacking Indonesian targets in different parts of the country. Between March and August 1983 the Indonesian military and Fretilin agreed a ceasefire, which enabled Fretilin to gain support for its position internationally and to persuade the UN Secretary-General to act as a mediator in the conflict.

In August the Indonesian Government unilaterally broke the ceasefire. Fretilin organized ambushes and attacks on Indonesian troops, using support networks set up in the resettlement villages. In the late 1980s these attacks became less frequent, and in November 1992 Fretilin's leader, Xanana Gusmao, was captured. This was followed by the capture of his successor, Mau Honu, in April 1993. Currently Fretilin retains a resistance network in the centre, south and east of the territory, but is less capable of mounting major attacks in earlier years; yet it continues to receive wide support from the population through an underground resistance network.

8 Opposition

Since the late 1980s opposition to the Indonesian occupation has shifted to younger East Timorese who have built up networks in the main towns and villages, notably Dili and Baucau. These groups organized demonstrations during the Pope's 1989 visit and for the planned visit if the Portuguese Parliamentary delegation in November 1991. When this visit was canceled, a demonstration in Dili were ahead on 11 November. Its suppression by the military ended in the infamous Santa Cruz massacre. Despite a

deeply conservative colonial role and antipathy to Fretilin during the pre-invasion period, the Catholic Church has been increasingly critical of the military.

Both the present and former Bishops of Dili - Carlos Ximenes Belo and Martinho Costa Lopes - have denounced torture, imprisonment and human-rights abuses. Church organizations have provided basic health and education facilities, and Tetum-speaking safe havens, despite increasing opposition from the military. In January 1985 the East Timorese Council of priests called for the right of East Timor to determine its own future and referred to the Church as 'being witness to a process which is slowly leading to the ethnic, cultural and religious extinction of the people of East Timor".